



"WORLD ORTHODOXY'S" SISTER CHURCH

—*A Denomination in Decline*—



Holy Orthodox Church in North America

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POSTSCRIPT

What is especially distressing to many conservative Roman Catholics is that Pope John Paul II is fully aware of a number of these disturbing developments within his denomination and is supportive of them!

Therefore, we must ask: Is this policy an abuse, a trademark, or a perogative of his infallibility?

If the "new" Roman Catholic denomination is indeed "World Orthodoxy's" sister church, then it is evident that both have strayed very far from the Apostolic Faith—as the foregoing articles have demonstrated.

Orthodox Christianity, the Faith of the Fathers, has no need of a worldly and confused "sister", and Orthodox Christians must be on their guard when their leaders speak of uniting with such a denomination. Rather than such "false unions," the Church seeks only one union—union with the living God.

By the intercessions of the holy Pillars of Orthodoxy—Saint Photius the Great, Patriarch of Constantinople, Saint Gregory Palamas of Thessalonica, and Saint Mark Eugenicus of Ephesus—may we all be counted worthy of this blessed union.

Amen.

"World Orthodoxy's" Sister Church

— One —

Editorial Comment: In recent years, many Orthodox bishops who are involved in Ecumenism have begun referring to Roman Catholicism as a "Sister Church." In this series of articles, we intend to demonstrate that the Roman Catholic denomination cannot possibly be Orthodoxy's "Sister Church," simply because of the many false and bizarre teachings which many, if not most, Roman Catholic clergy—from the Pope down—advocate and support, especially today. We realize that many good Roman Catholic people (and even some clergy) are unhappy about the recent developments in their denomination, but this is besides the point. We are concerned about teachings and practices that are going on right now, and which are condoned or officially promoted by the Roman Catholic hierarchy and clergy. The articles that we intend to publish will be taken directly from Roman Catholic and other religious periodicals.

Did Christ Really Rise from the Dead?

(Weekend Australia, October 22–23, 1988)¹

By GREG SHERIDAN

This is a story about the Roman Catholic Church, and whether it any longer has any beliefs which are sacred. It is a story about allegations of heresy and counter-allegations of a witch-hunt, about the mechanisms of Roman Catholic discipline and about the disintegration of belief, even of coherence and identity, within the oldest and largest Christian institution [*sic*].

Specifically it is about belief in the bodily resurrection of Christ, generally regarded as the most central doctrine of the Christian faith.

¹ The *Weekend Australian* is a Roman Catholic weekly.

It is about the widespread acceptance among Roman Catholicism's theologians and priests in Australia of the belief that Christ's resurrection somehow did not involve his physical body, a view radically at odds with the official Church position, and which contradicts traditional Catholic belief over 2000 years.

The story centers on Dr. David Coffey, head of systematic theology at St. Patrick's Seminary at Manly in Sydney. St. Patrick's is the oldest and most important Roman Catholic seminary in Australia.

Dr. Coffey by all accounts is a brilliant and devout man. Born in Mildura and raised in Sydney, he studied for the priesthood at Manly and was ordained in the late 1950s. Since the early 1960s, with a couple of years break for further study overseas, he has been an academic at the Manly seminary.

In 1960, he wrote an essay called "The Resurrection of Jesus and Catholic Orthodoxy." Dr. Coffey argued that a position which held that "the resurrection is an event not involving in any way the corpse of Jesus. . . is, or should be, acceptable to Catholic orthodoxy".

In the same article he argued that the empty tomb of Christ "had nothing to do with the resurrection as such. . ."

He speculated that there could be any number of explanations for the empty tomb: "One would be that despite the attention of the women (which may not be historical) the tomb was not the right one. Perhaps, as a result of the community's faith in the resurrection, an empty tomb was produced. . . and the story of the women created to authenticate it. . ."

Interestingly, Dr. Coffey himself acknowledges at the end of his article that if or when Rome comes to accept a view of the resurrection which does not involve Christ's physical remains, "a daunting pastoral problem will remain. However, it must not be assumed that official acceptance of such a position will automatically result in widespread loss of faith . . ."

Confession is all but forgotten in many parishes. One commentator wrote, "Have you ever noticed a cobweb on the door of a confessional? [Nonetheless], practically everyone who attends Mass can be counted on to run up for Communion. (Alas, many do the "Judas shuffle" as they hurry out of church immediately after receiving Communion.)"

The Wanderer offers a list of what "Call to Action," a prominent organization within Roman Catholicism, advocates:

Women's ordination.

Abortion without guilt.

"Gay," lesbian and trans-gender "liberation."

Contraception and sterilization.

Masturbation.

"New Age" and "feminist" spirituality.

Environmental "pantheism".

"Subsequent to the changes of Vatican II, large numbers of Roman Catholics have left the new church and joined fundamentalist or charismatic sects. Many joined the Baptist, Mormon, Bible churches, etc., since they offered, to a limited degree, the stability that was found in the Roman Catholic Church prior to Vatican II. Many joined the Jehovah Witnesses, Seventh Day Adventists, etc., to find a place preaching strong family values. Churches of God, Pentecostal churches, the Church of the Nazarene, Assembly of God and other charismatic churches find former Roman Catholics among their ranks. The charismatic movement which is promoted in the new [Roman Catholic] church differs little from that of their protestant 'brethren'."¹⁶

Finally, many Roman Catholics have joined the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church—the Orthodox Church.

This—not the present ecumenistic policies of World Orthodoxy's bishops—is the true fulfillment of Christ's prayer: "That all may be one" (John 17:21).

¹⁶ *What Has Happened to the Catholic Church?* Rev. Francisco Redecki and Rev. Dominic Redecki, Aylmer, Ontario, 1994, p. 95.

Roman Catholics are Defecting in Droves

"According to a new study sponsored by the Archdiocese of San Francisco, dissatisfaction with church doctrine and the Roman Catholic clergy are the major reasons why between 60,000 and 100,000 Hispanics leave the church every year in the United States. Hundreds of thousands of Roman Catholics are abandoning their church for sects or non-Catholic churches, with more than 150 people a day making the switch in the United States alone. The church estimates it has lost about 5 million Hispanics to other churches since 1980, said the Rev. Ricardo Chavez, director of Hispanic affairs for the California Catholic Conference in Sacramento."¹³

"Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo of Nicaragua said there had been a 'Protestant explosion' in predominantly Roman Catholic Latin America. Membership in non-Catholic churches or sects had grown from 4 million in 1967 to 30 million in 1985, he said. Converts from Roman Catholicism to other Christian faiths have tripled in the Dominican Republic in the past 30 years, risen by 500% in El Salvador and Costa Rica and swelled to 700% in Guatemala, Cardinal Ernesto Ahumada of Mexico reported."¹⁴

"In the 1990 survey, the difference between Roman Catholics and Protestants was small; 41% in each group attend church weekly or almost weekly. The new survey also found that the decline in the percentage of Roman Catholics attending church at least once a month continues."¹⁵

The Roman Catholic newspaper, *The Wanderer* (April 1, 1999), offers these insights:

Roman Catholicism has some 1,900 extinct dioceses in the world today.

Only about 40 percent of American Roman Catholics believe in the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist.

¹³ *The Daily News* (Los Angeles), April 7, 1991.

¹⁴ *The Los Angeles Times* (CA), April 6, 1991.

¹⁵ *Sacramento (CA) Union*, March 2, 1991.

Here Dr. Coffey seems to acknowledge that his beliefs on the resurrection run counter to those held by the great mass of Catholics over two millennia.

The Sydney Church authorities were apparently completely relaxed about Dr. Coffey's views. They took no action on the matter, made no public attempt to defend Orthodox Catholic doctrine and Dr. Coffey remained, as he does today, in good standing as a senior academic at Manly.

However, others were not so sanguine. A group of Roman Catholics in Sydney, including lay people and clerics, and including one of Dr. Coffey's then students at Manly, Brian Harrison, wrote to Rome complaining about Dr. Coffey's teachings. Eventually the Roman authorities sent Archbishop Clancy, the Archbishop of Sydney and the man ultimately responsible for the Manly seminary, a "please explain".

Archbishop Clancy twice passed on to Dr. Coffey requests that he respond to certain questions which the official Roman body, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, had about his work.

Dr. Coffey made two replies to Rome, forwarded through Archbishop Clancy. Last year, when the process had become somewhat public, the majority of the academic staff at Manly wrote to *The Bulletin* saying they fully supported Dr. Coffey.

Finally, a couple of weeks ago, Cardinal Clancy issued a statement: "It is widely known that some of the theological views of the Reverend Dr. David Coffey, of the Catholic Institute of Sydney, have been subject to study by Church authorities. . . The views in question concern the nature of the bodily resurrection of Christ. The matter is complex.

"The issues being sufficiently clarified, I have advised Dr. Coffey to align his teaching with that of the Magisterium of the Church, which is that the physical remains of Jesus, placed in the tomb after his death, were raised in His resurrection. Hence, the empty tomb. This, Dr. Coffey has readily undertaken to do."

Dr. Coffey confirmed that from now on in any public statements he made on the resurrection he would be obliged publicly to support the Cardinal's line on the resurrection.

Did that line have his private assent?

"That is a question no one has the right to ask me and I certainly won't answer," he said.

But while he hoped his public role in the matter would be at an end, he signalled that the controversy over his views would rage on. "This statement made by the Archbishop will itself be the subject of debate. . ."

Dr. Coffey alerted me to a letter from the president of the Australian Catholic Theological Association, Dr. Michael Putney, which will appear in *The Catholic Weekly*, Sydney's official Roman Catholic newspaper, on sale in Sydney's Roman Catholic churches tomorrow. That letter supports Dr. Coffey's position of 1960 and seems to flatly reject the Cardinal's Statement.

These new statements of Dr. Coffey's, combined with the *Catholic Weekly* letter, and the earlier letter of Dr. Coffey's colleagues to *The Bulletin* supporting him, surely pose a new and profound problem for Cardinal Clancy.

On the basis of this evidence, many—perhaps most—Roman Catholic priests do not believe in the physical resurrection of Christ, the central defining doctrine of the Church [emphasis ours].

The questions are begged: What will the cardinal do about this? Does he care that many priests apparently do not believe in the physical resurrection of Christ? How far is the Australian Catholic Church also part of the Roman Catholic Church? If Dr. Coffey is required to fall into line publicly with Rome, what about the Australian Catholic Theological Association?

Many Australian Roman Catholics believe that if [their denomination] will not stand up and defend the physical resurrection of Christ, there must be precious little it will stand up and defend.

Religious Brothers Worldwide

1962	1992
189,311	62,546
(a decline of 126,765)	

"Membership in U.S. Catholic religious orders has declined 40 percent since 1962, from 206,660 to 123,929 today."¹²

	1960	1985
U. S. Infant Baptisms	1,313,682	953,323
(a decline of 360,359)		

The Number of Converts to Roman Catholicism in the U.S.

	1960	1989
	146,212	82,409
(a decline of 63,803)		
1960	4.1 conversions per 1,000 Catholics	
1989	1.8 conversions per 1,000 (even though demands are less stringent)	

Decline in U.S. Roman Catholic Schools

	1962	1992
Elementary Schools	10,630	7,288
Number of Students	4,451,893	1,948,457
High Schools	2,485	1,278
Number of Students	945,785	602,856
Colleges and Universities	278	230

Fewer Wedding Bells in the U.S. Number of Roman Catholic Marriages

1971	416,924
1976	352,477
1986	342,440
1991	332,468
1992	322,550

¹² *The Buffalo (NY) News*, August 7, 1993.

mid 1988. According to recent statistics, there are more than eleven hundred priestless parishes at present."⁸

"In the decade before the Council, the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland had reached the peak of its influence. By the opening of the Council, one secondary school graduate in eight was opting for the priesthood. In 1958, for the first time ever, a total of more than 400 priests were ordained in Ireland. Thirty years later, in 1988, 155 men entered Irish diocesan seminaries while 83 others left before being ordained. Ordinations to the diocesan priesthood in 1989 totaled 72."⁹

"Many parishes have merged or closed because of the acute shortage of priests. About 70 out of the 180 dioceses around the country have begun using lay people and nuns to head parishes."¹⁰

"Ten per cent of all parishes in the United States do not even have a resident priest."¹¹

Roman Catholic Seminary Attendance

	1962	1992
Seminaries	545	220
Seminarians	46,189	6,247
	(a decline of 39,942)	

Nuns in America

	1964	1992
	180,015	97,751
	(a decline of 82,264)	

The December 1984 issue of *Our Sunday Visitor* noted that one third of the nuns in America are retired. Many have been forced into welfare and dependency on the state.

⁸ *Liguorian*, August 1990, p. 13.

⁹ *The Catholic World Report*, September/October 1992, pp. 31-32.

¹⁰ *Seattle Times*, November 18, 1989.

¹¹ *The Daily News* (Los Angeles) June 23, 1990.

Editors' Note: "World Orthodoxy's" clergy are presently endeavoring to change the Church's Paschalion in order to celebrate Christ's resurrection with people, such as these Roman Catholic clergy and professors of theology, who no longer believe in Christ's physical resurrection.

How does this present a "common witness" to the world?

— Two —

Many Roman Catholic people have become very distressed over recent developments within their denomination—which they are leaving in droves. First Things, a Roman Catholic periodical, observed the following in an article entitled "The Denomination Called Catholic," by David R. Carlin (First Things, Nov. 1997): "By now, nearly everyone has heard the statistics. From the end of Vatican II in 1965 to the present, the American Catholic Church has experienced dramatic drops in attendance at Sunday Mass, per capita contributions, the number of Catholic elementary and secondary schools, the population of priests and nuns, enrollment in seminaries and religious orders, the circulation of Catholic periodicals."

The following article explains in part the reason for this awesome decline of numbers within Roman Catholicism.

Pagan Service at Cathedral Marks World AIDS Day

*(Special to The Wanderer, December 4, 1997)**

SACRAMENTO—Under the guise of an interfaith prayer service for the AIDS agenda and AIDS casualties, the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament was the setting for pagan ceremonies on Sunday evening, November 30, the eve of World AIDS Day.

The ceremony included prayers to Buddha, Aztec rituals, non-

* *The Wanderer* is a Roman Catholic weekly.

denominational Christian songs, candle and incense rituals, and the "calling of names." It concluded with a procession to the nearby Hyatt Regency led by an Aztec priestess bearing incense, accompanied by drums and feathered Aztec cultists, to view 700 panels of the AIDS Quilt.

This observance of World AIDS Day was just one of many celebrated in Roman Catholic cathedrals and churches across the country, from Sacramento, to St. Augustine, to Washington, D.C., to Rochester, N.Y., as homosexual-related events in Roman Catholic churches pepper the calendar as feast days did in days of old.

Important homosexual events in Roman Catholic churches (in addition to AIDS funerals, blessing ceremonies, homosexual and lesbian choirs and concerts, "kids' days at the quilt," Dignity events, New Ways Ministry conferences) are now held in June, for Gay Pride Month; in October, for Gay Coming Out Month and Gay History Month; in November-December, for World AIDS Day. In addition, some churches, such as St. Francis in Sacramento, have hosted special homosexual Mardi Gras events before Lent.

The program at Blessed Sacrament for World AIDS Day was hosted and sponsored by the Diocese of Sacramento's Roman Catholic HIV/AIDS Ministry.

A longtime local Dignity activist at St. Francis Parish and "abbot" of a mixed gender/orientation religious community, garbed in Episcopalian white robes, was one of the officiators.

The ceremony opened with a "welcome" from Fr. John Healy, director of the diocese's HIV/AIDS ministry office, followed by the "lighting of the AIDS candle" by Sr. Mary Redempta and Tatiana Chambers.

A Buddhist Rissho Kosei-kai or "call to service" was led by Rev. Keiji Kunitomi, who began with a Homage and Meditation on the Place of Enlightenment, followed by a congregational recitation of Taking Refuge in the Three Treasures.

The congregation prayed:

that allows and encourages the implementation of tribal customs into the liturgy. (See Wynn, *Keepers of the Keys* and *The Reign of Mary*, Winter 1987.)

"Jazz Mass"

This was offered by John Paul II in New Orleans on September 12, 1987.

"Kiddy Mass"

These are now available with clowns, balloons, cookies and Kool Aid.

— Six —

Vital Statistics

Editors' Note: The statistics that follow are taken from various sources, but they all tell the same story of a denomination in serious decline. Certainly, whatever it is that Roman Catholicism has, we Orthodox Christians don't want to catch it. (In fact, the disease had been diagnosed long ago, but the patient refused to listen to the doctors—and that was in a time when the patient's ailments were considerably fewer.⁵)

"In a decade, one third of Chicago's [Roman Catholic] clergy left the priesthood."⁶

"The Archdiocese of Chicago, the nation's largest Roman Catholic jurisdiction, loses one priest every 18 days. In Cleveland, the Diocese has lost 25 priests in the first months of the year while adding but a single one."⁷

"The median age for a priest is over fifty, and by the year 2000 it will be closer to seventy. The number of seminarians has dropped from forty eight thousand in 1965 to thirteen hundred in

⁵ See *Sister Churches—Five Hundred Years After Florence*, Holy Orthodox Church in North America, Boston, 1994.

⁶ David Yallop, *In God's Name*, p. 186.

⁷ *Wall Street Journal*, November 13, 1990.

gling, balancing, comedy show which included animal tricks and a magic show. Admission was free. (The event was reported by *The Grand Rapids Press*.)

"People-Priest Mass"

A number of students at Notre Dame University remained seated and each held a piece of bread and a cup of wine "consecrated" with the priest at an experimental mass. (See Muggeridge, *The Desolate City*.)

"Marxist Mass"

On September 12, 1976, a "marxist mass" was held at St. Peter the Apostle Church in Montreal. The "mass" was "concelebrated" by Fr. Couture, the Minister of Labor in the Quebec government and a protestant minister. The service included political readings, anti-government songs and a film about the "communist martyr" Allende of Chile. A desk took the place of an altar. (See Muggeridge, *The Desolate City*.)

"Polka Mass"

Due to the decline in church attendance, an effort has been made to join entertainment with worship. The polka mass is the result. A polka band in the sanctuary plays throughout the mass. An ad in a Monroe, Michigan newspaper stated that "Big Daddy and the La Dee Das" were going to do an original polka mass at the local church. A drawing of a man with a beer mug in hand graphically conveyed the idea to potential worshippers.

"Drum & Spear Mass"

A Missionhurst priest, Fr. Herman Coenraets, who was clothed in native chieftain garb, offered a tribal service complete with swinging spears, tribal dancers and invocations to departed ancestors. A priest in Kinshasa, Zaire wore a monkey skin cap with a monkey tail hanging down his back for his service. Two tribesmen carrying spears led the procession into the church. This may seem far out, but it has become a way of life in the African church. The missionaries are simply applying the norms of Vatican Council II

"We take refuge in the Buddha! May we with all living beings realize the Great Way and aspire to unsurpassing intention.

"We take refuge in the Law! May we with all living beings embrace the riches of the sutra and make our wisdom wide and deep as the sea.

"We take refuge in the *Sangha*! May we with all living beings lead the multitude to freedom from all hindrances.

"The unsurpassed, profound, wonderful Law is rarely to be met with myriads of aeons. Now we have seen, heard, received, and kept it. May we understand the first principle of the *Tathagata*."

Rev. Kunitomi then recited the *O-daimoku* and the congregation chanted, ten times in response, *Namu Myoho Renge-kyo*.

Rabbi Reuven Taff from the Mosaic Law Congregation then read from Isaiah 9, and the congregation responded by singing Psalm 27.

The "calling of names," in which the congregation was invited to shout out the names of friends and family members who have died of AIDS, followed the rabbi's reading, and then the Aztec priestess led the Aztec blessing.

"In saluting and blessing the four directions," the program produced by the diocese explained, "we are asking for permission from the Creator, the energies/ancestors, and the elements to pray that they will give us guidance, protection, and humility; and that they will open the doors for all those who have died.

"The various feathers—Xantotl—used in the ritual are indigenous to and represent the people of the Americas. They symbolize unification."

The procession to the Hyatt followed.

Editors' Note: The article goes on to describe the various prophylactic devices that were on display at the Hyatt for the benefit of the congregation of the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament, with leaflets describing how these devices ensure "safe sex."

— Three —

Roman Catholic Ecumenical Bridges

The ecumenical movement today attempts to unify all religions. Pope John Paul II has been building bridges to non-Christian religions. Even Mother Teresa has the ecumenical spirit as seen from the book *Servants of Love*. She states, "we went every day to pray in some temple or church. The Archbishop gave us permission to do so. We prayed with the Jews, the Armenians, the Anglicans, the Jains, the Sikhs, the Buddhists, the Hindus. It was extraordinary. All hearts united in prayer to the one true God." (*Proclaiming the Gospel*, April 1997). Many [Editors' Note: including "World Orthodoxy"] in our day are being enticed into this ecumenical "bridge-building" web. Instead of warning believers of the apostate world church, they embrace those who are building it.

Calvary Contender, April 15, 1997

Editors' Note: Hindu sources maintain that there are 330 million gods at most (after all, we have to draw the line somewhere); all of these gods are to be honored and worshipped.² Now the question: which one of these worship-worthy 330 million "one true" gods did Mother Teresa get permission to pray to? Given the shopping mall variety available for adoration, how could her Archbishop be sure that he picked the right one for Mother?

The Holy Scriptures, on the other hand, are clear (though perhaps not politically correct) about this: "All the gods of the heathen are demons, but the Lord made the heavens" (Psalm 95:5). This is what the Holy Spirit has taught us through the holy Prophet David—the permission of Mother Teresa's archbishop notwithstanding.

² This is counting every local village deity, including the local female deities which the *Encyclopedia Britannica* estimates are worshipped by 80% of the southern Indians.

into a big drum. A banner hung at the table which read, "God, the Garbage Collector." (Attended by witnesses.)

"Gun Mass"

After assassination attempts on President Ford's life, Fr. Engle invited the parishioners to turn in their handguns at the offertory on Sunday October 12, 1975. Twelve handguns, sixteen starter pistols and twenty toy weapons were placed in a drum under police supervision. The guns were later melted down to make crosses which were handed to the parishioners. (Television cameras covered the event. It was also recorded in the October 27, 1975 issue of *Time*.)

"Pizza & Beer Mass"

Various substitutions have been made for the bread and wine normally used during mass, such as chicken and coffee, cookies and coke, pizza and beer, tacos and tequila. (See Muggeridge, *The Desolate City*.)

"Halloween Mass"

The Catholic chaplains at the University of Buffalo (now called the State University of New York at Buffalo) staged a "halloween mass" with both priest and people clad in costumes. This phenomenon occurs in many major cities across the United States on Halloween. (See Muggeridge, *The Desolate City*.)

"Clown Mass"

In recent years the "clown mass" has grown considerably in popularity. A priest at Mariopolis, a large Roman Catholic university in Montreal, offered a clown mass and was photographed by the press following the event. The University of Toronto chaplains dressed like clowns and used hand puppets during the service to entertain the audience. Balloons are often released inside churches during "kiddy masses." (See Muggeridge, *The Desolate City*.)

"Circus Mass"

Rev. Nick Weber started the world's smallest complete circus. He brought his twelve animals and four clowns to St. Jude Roman Catholic Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan and performed a jug-

coffees, crime, and other issues that most American Christians, whether Roman Catholic or Protestant, might list as they ponder their country's social ills. . . .

The overall drift of USCC maneuverings in Washington is leftward. And cooperation with the NCC and secular religious groups arouses more high-profile activity and enthusiasm than do the USCC's more conservative coalition on abortion or pornography. For the USCC, the Christian right is noticeably a less sought after ally than the religious left.

The USCC's propensity for political pontificating, cozy alliances with the secular left, and preference for social justice issues over traditional Christian moral issues, all follow an eerie pattern familiar to mainline Protestants. The NCC is not an example to follow for any church body wanting to sustain effective political influence, much less one that desires firm roots in the historic teachings of Christianity.

— Five —

*The Effects of "Liturgical Renewal"*⁴

Vatican II allowed experimentation with the Mass. This has resulted in abuses that are documented below. Certain guidelines were to be followed, but the language of the documents was so ambiguous that many priests came to the conclusion that "anything goes." As a result, such things as Santa Masses, Easter Bunny Masses, Thanksgiving Turkey Masses and Marijuana Masses exist.

"Garbage Mass"

Fr. Richard Engle offered what has been called a "garbage mass" at St. Philip the Apostle Church in Columbus, Ohio during the summer of 1975. He invited the parishioners to bring their household garbage in bags to the altar during the offertory and drop it

⁴ From *What Has Happened to the Catholic Church?*, by Rev. Fr. Radecki and Rev. D. Radecki, The Alymer Express Ltd., pp. 153-5, p. 80.

— Four —

*USCC Joins Hands With National Council Of Churches*³

(*The Wanderer*, June 10, 1999)

By Mark Tooley

WASHINGTON, D.C.—For the second year, a representative from the National Conference of Catholic Bishops delivered formal greetings to the General Assembly of the National Council of Churches (NCC). This latter episode took place in November, 1998.

Bishop Timothy Joseph, a retired auxiliary bishop from Chicago, said his fellow bishops had so appreciated the visit by NCC officers to the Roman Catholic bishops' meeting in 1997, that they suggested the two bodies now exchange greetings every year.

Bishop Joseph told the NCC that Roman Catholic bishops are "happy" about the continuing Roman Catholic "collaboration" with the mostly Protestant NCC. In another symbol of that cooperation, the NCC's next president, former U.S. ambassador to the UN Andrew Young, will be installed into his new office at a service at the Roman Catholic cathedral in Cleveland, Ohio, in November.

The courtesies exchanged between the NCC and the Catholic bishops represent only the surface of growing cooperation between the New York-based NCC and the staff of the Washington-based U.S. Catholic Conference (USCC), which is supposed to implement the policies of Roman Catholic bishops.

From environmentalism to welfare reform, from racial justice to demands for political "civility," the NCC and the USCC find themselves working increasingly in tandem. The cooperation between American Catholicism's public policy arm and the NCC might have

³ Edited for considerations of space.

been understandable 30-40 years ago, when the NCC still could claim to speak for America's Protestant majority and was a serious contender in the arenas of civil rights and foreign policy.

Today, the NCC is a dissipated shadow of its former self. Fewer than one-third of America's church members belong to NCC denominations, whose flagship churches (United Methodists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians) have suffered steep decline. And even among its own claimed constituency, the NCC bureaucracy is largely irrelevant. Mainline (or old-line) Protestants continue to vote and express their faith in ways very much at odds with their professed denominational representatives.

So why the enhanced Roman Catholic cooperation with an NCC that often lacks respect even among its secular left friends? Why is the U.S. Catholic Conference not instead seeking common ground with more robust Christian bodies such as the Southern Baptist Convention (America's largest Protestant group) or the National Association of Evangelicals? Why little to no cooperation with groups such as Focus on the Family, the American Family Association, the Family Research Council, or even the Christian Coalition? These groups are closer to Roman Catholic teaching on moral and cultural issues, and they flex more political muscle than the NCC of today.

The answer would seem to be that the USCC staffers prefer the left-leaning economic and foreign policy views of the NCC to the social and theological conservatism of the Christian right. USCC personnel are supposed to represent America's nearly 400 active and retired Roman Catholic bishops. Not content with the already liberal-leaning statements by their bishops on disarmament, health care, and welfare, staff members have employed ecumenical cooperation with the NCC to justify policies even further leftward. . .

Meanwhile, social issues involving abortion, homosexuality, and pornography are often downplayed by the USCC so as not to disrupt its relations with the NCC.

A Decline In Relevance

The growing USCC-NCC alliance could play out in one of two directions. As the public policy voice for one leg in America's religious triad of mainline Protestants, evangelicals, and Roman Catholics, the USCC tilt toward the NCC may create a permanent alliance that resuscitates the religious left and counteracts surging evangelical influence. Liberal Protestant spokesmen certainly hope so, and they increasingly cite USCC support when their theological orthodoxy or political temperance is questioned by conservative critics. . . .

This alliance points to a dangerous compromise with America's decadent popular culture, one of whose chief causes was the collapse of a vibrant Christian orthodoxy within the mainline churches. . . .

Consultation between the NCC and USCC has existed for decades, with the NCC long harboring hopes for full Roman Catholic participation as a member church. Some overt cooperation between the NCC and USCC occurred during the civil rights movement in the 1960s. But formal cooperation in recent years did not begin until 1993, when the USCC joined with the NCC and the Synagogue Council of America in "A Call to the Common Ground for the Common Good."

Although lacking specific policy proposals, the "call" sought to start a "fresh debate over the renewal of the general welfare," which it linked to a government guarantee of minimum living standards and health care for all persons. Popularly acclaimed as a moral counterforce to the religious right by the religious "mainstream," the document focused on the "option for the poor," whose material plight is a "crucial moral test" for the nation. Food stamps, Medicare, and Medicaid were defended as vital pillars of America's moral legitimacy.

Spiritual and moral problems received scant attention in the document. Abortion was unmentioned. So, too, were the decline of the two-parent family, pornography, homosexuality, illegal nar-